

# **2009-2010 GRAND JURY REPORT**

## **County of Riverside**

### **Blythe Animal Shelter**

#### **Background**

The Blythe Animal Shelter is one of several shelters operated by the County of Riverside Department of Animal Services (DAS). The shelter is located approximately five miles west of the City of Blythe, near the Blythe airport. The facility is comprised of three small buildings: the administration office, the dog kennel and the cat kennel with an adjoining euthanasia room.

Some members of the 2009-2010 Riverside County Grand Jury made an unannounced visit to the Blythe Animal Shelter on March 1, 2010. The following findings are based on conditions present at that time.

#### **Findings**

1. During inspection of the dog kennel, staff informed grand jury members that the entire kennel had been exposed to the parvovirus. At least two dogs had tested positive for this highly contagious and deadly disease. Staff stated this was the second such outbreak at this facility. When questioned as to why sick animals had been placed in the same kennel with healthy animals, staff responded they have no separate quarantine area.
2. Parvovirus is a highly contagious disease, almost always fatal to dogs. Once parvo has been introduced into an area, the virus can live on surfaces such as: floors, walls, cages and food dishes, as well as dirt and grass. People can also transmit the virus on their hands, clothing and shoes. Hand sanitizers and disinfectant trays or mats (for footwear) should be used to limit the transfer of the virus. None were present at this facility. Jurors were directed to a closet in the office and told to use a household disinfectant spray for clothing and shoes.

3. No signs warning of the presence of parvo were posted and verbal notice was not given until after jurors were inside the kennel.
4. Upon entering the area where cats are housed, jurors observed a cage with paperwork lying on top indicating the presence of a cat; however, the cage was empty. When questioned, staff stated they were unsure of the cat's location and possibly the "work release girl" had taken it. (The Riverside County Department of Probation Alternative Sentencing Program allows some individuals to "volunteer" in exchange for a reduced sentence.)
5. Inspection of the euthanasia room revealed a refrigerator and cabinets, which although outfitted with hasps and locks, were not locked. Contents included vaccines, euthanasia drugs, syringes and other medical supplies. This area is adjacent to the cat room and accessible to work release workers. The controlled substance log was being kept in the administration area.
6. Inspection also revealed two cats housed in cages in the euthanasia room. Staff stated the cats had been in the shelter for some time and were living in the euthanasia room because the cages were larger than the cages in the cat kennel area.
7. The office assistant works alone on the shelter premises, in an isolated area, from 4:00 – 7:00 one night a week, to accommodate pet turn-in and pick-up. This practice jeopardizes the safety of a county employee in violation of Board of Supervisors Policy C-27, "Workplace Violence, Threats and Securities".
8. The Blythe Animal Shelter is in need of many repairs; however, a new facility is being built in the City of Blythe. It is located a few blocks off the main thoroughfare. The projected completion date is late 2010.

Upon entering the dog kennel, it was immediately apparent the facility was infested with cockroaches. Staff stated this has been a problem for some time. Efforts to exterminate them have been hindered by the presence of animals, which prohibits the use of effective poisons. The infestation was present in all three buildings, as well as the shipping container where extra food is stored.

## **Recommendations**

**Riverside County Board of Supervisors  
Riverside County Community Health Agency  
Riverside County Department of Animal Services**

1. Sick animals must be quarantined to prevent spreading the parvovirus and other contagious diseases. Riverside County Department of Animal Services Policy No. 300-03, "Quarantine Guidelines", states in part: "doors leading into the Quarantine rooms will be locked at all times."
2. Blythe Animal Shelter personnel should immediately install disinfecting trays or mats outside all entrances and exits to enable visitors and staff to disinfect their footwear prior to entering and exiting each building at the facility. Dispensers containing hand sanitizer should be installed in the kennel areas as well as in the office.
3. Signs warning of the danger of spreading parvo and the importance of disinfecting should be posted outside and inside the facility to clearly inform all entering of the hazard prior to exposure.
4. No animals should be removed from the facility without proper authorization and processing of paperwork. Individuals in the work release program should be supervised at all times.
5. All vaccines, euthanasia drugs, syringes and other medical supplies should be kept locked except when being used. The controlled substance log should be locked in a safe when not in use. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 21, Food and Drugs, 1301.71(a) requires all registrants provide effective controls and procedures to guard against theft and diversion of controlled substances.
6. No animals should be housed in the euthanasia room. Euthanasia should never be performed in front of live animals. County of Riverside, DAS Euthanasia Standard Operating Procedure states, in part: "...euthanasia will not be performed in sight of another animal."

The larger cages should be relocated outside the euthanasia room. "While animals do not 'know' they are about to be euthanized, they do recognize that they are in an unfamiliar environment and efforts should be made to reduce stress prior to euthanasia." (Humane Society of the United States Animal Services Consultation Report, 2005)

7. DAS should comply with Board Policy C-27, Section IX, 2.g., which states in part: “No employee should be permitted to work or stay in a facility or isolated unit when they are the only staff member present in the facility, if the location is so isolated that they are unable to obtain assistance if needed, or in the evening or at night if the clinic or office is closed.”
8. Upon completion of the new shelter facility, care should be taken, to ensure that all furniture, computers, files, linens, supplies and extra food are pest free before being transferred, to prevent any infestation of the new location.